The Spirit of the Pines

Margaret Morse

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THE SPIRIT OF THE PINES

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BY

MARGARET MORSE

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TO THE MEMORY OF E. H. D.

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I

THE MEETING OF THE WAYS

THE MEETING OF THE WAYS

"YOU surely cannot refuse a traveler shelter from so pitiless a storm!"

"*You* surely cannot intrude when I tell you that I wish to be alone!"

"I regret forcing myself upon your unwilling hospitality, but the water is rising rapidly, and I am in danger of drowning."

Outside in the rain and darkness stood the man, his coat-collar buttoned tightly about his throat, his hat pulled over his eyes. Inside, framed by the low doorway, the slender black-robed figure of the girl was silhouetted against the light.

"The situation would be tragic if it were not so humorous," the man resumed. Then he broke off, shaken by a violent attack of coughing.

The girl sprang across the narrow hall, un-

chained and flung open the half-closed door. The wind swept roughly past her, and the rain struck her with angry force.

"Why did n't you tell me," she cried, "that you were" —

"Dying?" the man asked. "It scarcely seemed necessary in the face of such a storm. Take care! you 'll spoil your gown."

The girl was feeling of his coat with quick, nervous fingers, and her skirt trailed in a pool of water.

"You 'd better leave me on the mat to drip," he advised.

"You shall go directly upstairs and put on dry clothes, then come down to the fire," she ordered.

A door leading from the kitchen was thrown open, and the bustling farmer's wife appeared.

"I was sure I heard the front door," she exclaimed triumphantly, "but Steve and the children thought 't was only the wind. Why, Master David!" — the big stranger was suddenly gathered into a pair of motherly

arms. "You knew where to come, did n't you!"

"Indeed I did, Nurse, though they assured me at the station that you 'had comp'ny and could n't accommodate me.' I thought you would surely put me up for the night," he ended rather wearily.

"You shall stay as long as ever you like," the woman told him.

Then she broke off suddenly with a quick glance at the dark figure in the doorway.

"Oh, I forgot!" she ended helplessly. "And you two children don't even know each other. Miss North — Dr. Leighton."

The girl put out her hand eagerly. "We feel like old friends already, Nursie dear," she said. "We 've been so disagreeable to each other. At least, it was I, of course, who was selfish and hateful and tried to send Dr. Leighton away. Now I 'm sorry, so please let him stay as long as he likes."

"You know how she 's always tyrannized

over me!" their hostess declared to the newcomer. "She made me promise" —

"Never mind, Nursie. Anyway it's all your fault because you spoiled me. Now we must take care of Dr. Leighton. He's cold, and he's" — she stopped abruptly — "wet," she concluded. Something in the man's dark eyes forbade her saying "ill."

The farmer appeared in the kitchen doorway, then strode forward with hearty greeting, and a troop of children surrounded Leighton, until their mother drove them laughingly away.

"Go and help get supper, the whole pack of you!" she commanded cheerfully. "Now come, hurry upstairs, Master David."

"I feel seven years old again," laughed the man, as he obediently followed her.

A merry confusion ensued. The hitherto quiet household awoke to a new sense of life and importance.

The fire in Constance North's little sitting-

room had burned low, and a rosy light surrounded the girl in her high-backed chair, and the man who, from the opposite side of the chimney corner, contentedly watched her.

"Is n't it odd?" Constance remarked, staring into the embers. "If you and I had met at a dance to-night, we probably should have thought it quite an occasion — two idolized children of one nurse, meeting at last."

"Probably," the man agreed, "and we should have talked a lot of twaddle about its being a coincidence, I don't doubt."

"And we meet in the wilds of New Hampshire and sit here by the fire, like two old cronies who have known each other a lifetime."

"Little things seem big down there in the world," the man mused. "Up here big things seem little."

He turned from the girl to the fire. "One's personal troubles, for instance, sink into insignificance."

"I wish I could feel it so!" Constance cried. "Mine seem only the more vivid."

Leighton cast a swift glance at the black gown. "I 'm sorry," he said. "We 're both in trouble. Perhaps we can help each other."

"I 've been helped to-night — roused out of my selfish idleness," Constance admitted.

"And you really would have driven me out into the storm?"

"Do you know why? You stood there in the shadow, a great broad-shouldered figure. I actually resented your strength and your independence. Then I heard you cough" —

The man fidgeted. "Absurdly incongruous," he murmured. Then he laughed. "Why is it, I wonder," he asked quizzically, "that a girl always feels obliged to abuse an able-bodied man; often he positively pines for pity, while the really unfortunate" — He broke off abruptly.

"She likes to be needed," Constance said. "It was always the forlorn doll without hair or clothes, whom other children shunned, that

I loved best. Then there was the homely kitten, and the delicate puppy. I believe I would caress a sick porcupine."

"Doubtless!" laughed Leighton, "and not even know when it pricked you."

"I have always foreseen that I shall marry a querulous cripple, and end my days fetching and carrying for him," Constance resumed.

"That would be nice for the cripple and rather beneficial for you. Do you know," he said presently, as the girl did not speak, "we never could have met at that dance. It was always meant that we should meet here. Fate has been saving up a pleasant little surprise for all these years."

"Oh!" Constance exclaimed sympathetically, "that is my way of looking at things. I did n't know it was yours."

"Surely you must allow even a realist the luxury of an occasional dream," the man returned. "I suppose we all are given two sides to keep one from wearing threadbare."

The girl rose. "Since we understand each other, there is something I wish to show you," she said.

She took from a drawer of the desk a small oval frame and put it in his hand. The man found himself smiling involuntarily into the sunny, upturned face of a child. At last he lifted his eyes from the miniature to the girl who stood staring into the fire.

"So this is what you have lost," he said slowly.

"This is what I have lost," she repeated dully.

Suddenly she turned and faced him, her hands clenched tightly before her. "He was all I lived for," she said. "Why must I live without him?"

Leighton leaned his arm against the chimney-piece and looked at her musingly.

"We all ask ignorant questions," he said. "Only yesterday I was saying, 'Why must I die?' I felt quite abused when the doctor ordered me to Colorado, and grudgingly al-

lowed me a few weeks here. It was a particularly mellow day, and somehow I felt that the world was rather a good place."

Constance was resting her chin in her hand, and the light fell across her clear profile.

"You have beauty and health," he remarked contemplatively.

The girl did not look up.

> "Where is the use of the lip's red charm,
> The heaven of hair, the pride of the brow?"

She murmured more to herself than to him.

Then they both stared in silence into the embers. At last the man stirred. "Listen," he said.

The rain was beating relentlessly upon the roof, and the wind howled.

Constance raised her head.

"They both want it all their own way, don't they!" she said understandingly. "Hear how the wind is protesting, and it does n't do him a bit of good, poor old thing."

For some time they sat together in the red

glow — a magic circle apart from the world of reality. At length the girl rose and lighted her candle.

"Good-night," she said, putting out her hand. "To-morrow we can begin again."

The man smiled into her eyes.

"To-morrow we can begin where we've left off," he answered. "Good-night."

II

LETTERS

I

DAVID TO CONSTANCE

FRIDAY.

DEAR FELLOW TRAVELER: —

GOOD-MORNING — and what a good morning it is! I trust you are drawing this glorious October air deep into your lungs, and with every breath thanking fortune that you are alive and likely to keep on living. They have bundled me up like a mummy and set me out on my balcony, where the sun lies warm and bright. Powerless to resist, I must sit here till burned to a cinder, if they chance to forget me. So this is the penalty I pay for that short battle with the elements yesterday. Solitary confinement for at least a fortnight. The walk in the storm is what I 'm alluding

to. It was your blessed fire that saved me from ruin. Did you see that big man who went out just now with — I am sure — an expression of fiendish glee on his face? When I was a doctor — you see, I put it in the past tense, for my short period of authority is over — I wonder if I took such delight in laying down the law to my helpless patients. I suppose I did. I must n't talk, the great Mogul says — and how wisely! — for I have no voice. I must n't have visitors, for they will excite me. He must have caught a glimpse of you. But oh! blessed omission, he has said nothing about letters — and so let 's write to each other. Nurse Martin, who by the way, does n't come under the doctor's ban, promises to be postmistress, and so it only remains with you to complete the arrangement. Our correspondence lacks the spice of secrecy, but perhaps it does savor of originality, for I never wrote letters to a girl whom I had met just the evening before. Did you? — to a man, I mean.

Seriously, I want to know what is happening in that great nature world which is yours for the asking, and where I long to join you. From my sky parlor I saw you pass by this morning. Was the ground all springy underfoot after the rain, and was the little path up the mountain carpeted with pine needles and fallen maple leaves? I hope you will always wear that white dress. I don't like black. I thought your hair was brown till I saw it in the sunshine. I hope you don't resent these personal remarks. If you do you have only to say so. Not that it will affect me in the least, but it will soothe your feelings.

Write to me, if you will, as you talked to me last night, and I will answer you, not pleasantly perhaps, but — or because — frankly. A man who has had to bear the knocks of this world has learned a few truths, but of what use are they unless he pass them on?

So here is my humble beginning. It is for you to say whether or not it shall continue.

D. L.

II

CONSTANCE TO DAVID

FRIDAY EVENING.

DEAR PRISONER: —

YOU are generous to exonerate me, but in spite of it I don't feel blameless. Some one once said to me, "I wish I ever knew how to act the *first* time!" And I heartily echoed her sentiments. In the course of human events, it is hardly likely that I shall find a second dripping man upon my doorstep, so of what use this bitter fruit of experience?

I wish you had been with me this morning to follow the little cart-path. Do you remember it? winding through rolling pas-

ture land, then dipping into a young wood of slender white birch. They were set there, I am sure, just to make a becoming background for some flaming maples. High up on the mountain, I stretched out among the pine needles — oh, so soft and springy! — and stared up at the patches of sky, — tiny, but so blue, — through the fringy tree-tops. Does the sound of the wind in the pines, and that hot smell, bring back long-ago, far-away dreams to you? Did you ever feel that the sounds one goes to sleep with and wakes up with, in childhood, influence one all through life? Whenever I hear whispering pines I am back in the old nursery, slipping off to sleep, or dreamily waking. Do you know what I longed for there? — The strength and independence of those great trees. I felt like a prostrate one near me, and envied him his peace. *He* need n't straighten himself up and go on living.

Poor prisoner — or poor me, rather! — certainly it is the irony of fate that you should

be huddled on a balcony, while I am literally steeped in nature. She merely intensifies whatever mood one is in, it seems to me, and this morning in her vivid array she was distinctly depressing, like some proud beauty, fair of face but cold of heart.

You may be wondering what I saw from the top of the mountain, or if I was so blind that I saw nothing. Below me, shimmery hills stretched far away into the blue distance, and again, below, a river threaded its way through cool meadow land where white villages clustered. Far away, like mere specks, were dotted the spires and chimneys of a busy town. From my mountain-top it all looked so tiny and unimportant, like a doll's village which one sets out on a table to amuse a child. One could scarcely believe that real people, with real joys and sorrows, lived there.

You wise man who have learned great truths in the world, can you tell me if to the angels who look down upon us, our lives

seem so utterly trivial? Then what is the meaning of it all?

C. N.

I did n't know that you were spying upon me from your watch tower. Thank you for a timely warning.

III

DAVID TO CONSTANCE

THE WATCH TOWER,
SATURDAY MORNING.

AND so, dear Fellow-Dreamer, — for here, again, we are surely companions, — your mind loves to turn toward "old, unhappy, far-off things, and battles long ago."

I know of no pastime more fascinating than to indulge in this shadowy remembrance — or more fatal. That is, granting one has definite work to accomplish, as most of us (thank heaven!) have.

Other sounds which fill my dream-world, beside the sound of the wind in the pines (was n't I born and brought up among the

tree-tops !), are the splashing of waves on the shore, and music when one is half awake.

When I was a little chap I was waked one night by a woman's voice singing. I sat up in bed, quivering with excitement, ready to throw myself at that woman's feet, and to die for her sake. It was a ridiculous little song she sang, the grown-ups told me afterward — something about "Birdie having lost her wings" — and she was a tightly-laced creature, forced to loosen her gown when she sang. Did you ever hear anything more disenchanting? But the impression survived, and to this day I recall the episode with a pleasant thrill. Which all proves, I suppose, that it is n't what our minds receive, but the mood in which they receive it, that counts.

Not that theories matter in the least. I like to swallow things unlabeled — don't you? They seem less medicinal.

And so you stood on your mountain-top yesterday, and the world seemed shadowy and far away. A mere question of point-of-view,

I imagine, since you ask my opinion. That reminds me that I 've been climbing a little mountain of my own all my life, trying to get above the rush and noise, to get a good perspective. I wonder if you have too, and if we suddenly have perched on the top together! On my peak there is no more "touching things with muffled hands, and seeing through a veil." We just live in the sunlight. And that which down in the world was called strange becomes natural, and sorrow becomes bearable (I will claim no more than that) because we see clearly. And better still, prejudice and habit having slipped away, we see each other clearly. Do you suppose that is the reason we already have grown to know each other as easily as children do?

You see, up here we need n't hide our feelings under a mask of indifference. Let 's tell each other our troubles, let 's help each other, and let 's be happy! It 's our birthright, and nothing need take it away.

Did n't you put poor old Nature rather at a disadvantage yesterday? I imagine she takes large views, and resents the personal attitude. Besides, to be on friendly terms with her you must first

> "Lift up the latch
> And ask your neighbor in!"

Since I am a literal person, quite lacking imagination, will you tell me if you 'd honestly like to change places with that prostrate pine? Being unfettered has always seemed so attractive to me that I am curious to know your argument in favor of inanimate objects.

Will you write me about some of these things?

D. L.

IV

CONSTANCE TO DAVID

On Pine Mountain,
Sunday.

I AM sitting among the pines trying to "let Nature in," and so, dear mentor, to better understand her and you. Think of the pathos in trying to be natural.

Your letter interested and exasperated me — the latter especially. Where, O wise man, is your wisdom in condemning my "personal attitude," as you coolly call it? Surely we must remind the world that we have some degree of individuality — meagre though it be. Now, to me, feelings, thoughts, and ideas are the realities of life. Another may find

satisfaction in adding columns of figures, and in paralyzing one with his glibness at names and dates. Oh, how useful information bores me! Not that I am proud of this — neither am I ashamed, for it is inborn with a love of animals and a hatred of superficiality.

Don't you agree with me that feelings are the most real part of us, and therefore worthy of our profound respect? We make ourselves act and speak with due propriety, but our feelings are as independent as they were the day we were born, if we had them then. At least we had them soon after, for I am cut to the heart now by the same silly things that made me howl with grief at the age of three.

And you say we are unfettered — meaning, I suppose, that we can make of ourselves what we will.

Nature is in a gentle mood this morning — or, according to your theory, is it I who am in the gentle mood, and so she is able to im-

press me in that way? With her soft wind and her caressing sunshine, she almost makes me feel at peace. Almost, I say, but therein lies a vast chasm. Real peace can come, it seems to me, only through forgetfulness, and as long as I live I must remember. Do you know what it is to be eternally tortured by a grief — to force it from you by day only to dream of it by night? You cannot, else you would not be so calm.

Theories, I find, are all well enough to apply to other people's troubles, but when we are crushed by a great personal loss they are crushed too. Even the philosopher in "Rasselas" was so weakly human as to grieve when his daughter died. You remember?

The woods are filled with noonday drowsiness. Perhaps this is an enchanted forest, and under these whispering branches I may fall into a dreamless sleep, and wake in a hundred years. What a blessed rest it would be! Perhaps one might forget. But then you would n't be here, and for that I should be sorry.

This I must tell you by way of encouragement: The spirit of your mountain peak I actually do feel. The chilling, mental fog — I remember how that phrase of Stevenson's pleased me when I chanced upon it — is slipping away.

And so we will be frank with each other, and you will criticise me to your heart's content. For that is what "telling each other our troubles" will amount to, I foresee. It is good of me to submit to such an agreement, for of all things in the world I particularly detest criticism — a sign of vanity, egotism, and selfishness, I hasten to say, to spoil your opportunity.

If you think me worth arguing with, keep on writing to me.

C. N.

V

DAVID TO CONSTANCE

THE WATCH TOWER,
MONDAY.

MY humble greetings to you, O Spirit of the Pines! And so, feelings, thoughts, and ideas are to you the realities of life, you say. The inevitable result of an introspective nature, and an ample bank account, I answer. Were it necessary for you to scrub floors for a living, you would not dwell so largely on things metaphysical. And incidentally, if some one before you had not "added columns of figures" rather well, you would now be in no position to ignore this practical side of life.

Thoughts are all very well in their way, fair dreamer, but in the world of reality there is prejudice in favor of accepting deeds as their lawful coin.

Amiel — who must, I know, be a friend of yours — touches upon the subject, you remember? Something about its being less convincing to talk of one's powers of self-sacrifice than to do a simple, generous deed.

The idea may be commonplace and, as such, beneath your notice.

Speaking of ideas — yours of falling asleep for a hundred years seems to me picturesque but unsatisfactory. I fear the world would have journeyed on some distance during your oblivion, and your equipment for fighting the dragons in the path would be rusty. I wonder, though, why we need challenge these responsibilities of ours when we meet them. Supposing we stretched out a friendly hand and bade them welcome, do you believe they would prove such monsters after all?

You think me harsh, unsympathetic, I know — but remember I have had to be a practical dreamer, and so I give practical advice.

What meaning did the woods hold for you this morning, I wonder? Your step was lighter as you passed by. But why, may I ask, did you wear that black gown to-day of all heaven-sent days?

Nurse Martin has just left me after feeding me like a baby. This glorious air is doing me more good than all their horrid mixtures. And there I get the better of them, for *that* — thank fortune — can't be measured out by the spoonful!

I feel like a fighting cock, but have to suppress my energy, for this little miserable six by eight balcony admits of no war dancing. For general position, however, it could n't be improved upon, I admit. The clouds, the shadows, the sunshine — especially the sunshine! — are all mine.

Will you go on telling me your troubles

and not mind my roughness — or rather begin to tell me about the one great trouble?

Trust me.

D. L.

VI

CONSTANCE TO DAVID

MONDAY AFTERNOON.

I AM afraid of you, O practical dreamer! Would you draw my story from me only to tear it to shreds — to weigh in the balance all that I hold most sacred, in order to learn whether this or that paltry trouble need have disturbed the even tenor of life?

Do you realize for what you are asking? Do you understand that if I tell my story at all, I must tell just what I feel, and that my heart is breaking with the pain of it?

C. N.

VII

DAVID TO CONSTANCE

MONDAY EVENING.

OU forget. There is to be no fear and no distrust. We both have suffered, and we both understand.

D. L.

VIII

CONSTANCE TO DAVID

MONDAY EVENING (LATE!)

YOU have a wonderfully simple way of putting things which makes me quite ashamed. Yes, I will tell you, but not to-night. To-morrow, on the mountain, under the great pines, it will be easier.

The woods were beautiful and sympathetic this morning, and to-day everything seemed wide awake. As I struck into the wood-path a little rabbit bobbed up just in front of me, sat up on his hind legs a second, then catching sight of Sandy and me, scudded at top speed into his hole. We had no murderous intentions in our hearts, but that the poor

little beastie could n't know. I suppose they must distrust us all on principle.

Sandy goes with me on all my rambles, and he is the best of companions, dear old thing. George Eliot was wise in saying that dogs are the best of friends because they ask no questions and make no criticisms.

I am so glad you are feeling better. I have not asked because Nurse gives me a cheerful account every day. Dear soul! Her wholesome presence must be a tonic in itself. I was jealous of you all those years ago when she used to tell me about that good boy she had taken care of, and I am jealous now, for she is still just as partial.

That poor old black gown! Surely a practical dreamer should know that one can't wear white indefinitely. This is wash-day.

C. N.

IX

CONSTANCE TO DAVID

On Pine Mountain,
Tuesday Morning.

THE pine trees are singing to me just as they used to do long ago. Somehow they encourage confidence, and I seem to be talking to you through their branches.

One spends years in living a life, but in how pitifully short a time the whole story can be told.

As you agree with me about the influence of early surroundings, I must give you a little idea of mine, so that you may judge for yourself their effect. Picture, then, in your own mind a sensitive child needing sympathy

and genuine affection, brought up in an unimaginative New England household. Instead of the warmth and light which should always surround a child, there was a chilling atmosphere of disapproval. That "inheritance of Puritanic gloom" of which Hawthorne speaks, supplanted all joyous God-given feelings in my aunt and uncle, and I fear descended from generations upon me as a natural right. If "happiness is our birthright" some of us surely are cheated!

This pious couple were not above painful disputes. Why can't older people realize the effect of stormy scenes upon an impressionable child? I used to cudgel my poor, small brain, trying to recall my father and mother who were very happy together, I was told. They had left me a goodly fortune, but not one little remembrance of themselves. One of my most vivid recollections is of shrinking from the embrace of a well-meaning relative, then sobbing myself to sleep because I had nobody to kiss. So my happiness lay in

the outdoor world, where I flourished with the trees and flowers and spent my love on my animals. They returned it in their generous way, and always have seemed to me more worthy than most human beings. The tragedy is that their lives are so short, and one must suffer repeated losses and heartaches.

The period watched over by dear Nurse—that rosy-cheeked English girl, as you too remember her—is a bright spot to look back upon.

From that stage to life in the city where school, dances, entrance into society followed each other in quick succession, was a complete transition. Living in the big town house, my time was filled by teas, dinners, and balls which I enjoyed in a feverish way when not too impressed with the hollowness of it all. One can talk and laugh through dinners and dances, but it does n't often satisfy. I could show my real feelings under those glaring lights no better than I could

show my unreal ones under these pine trees. And so they called me "the cold Miss North," and you would have done the same had you known me in the same way.

And now I come to the great reality. I hardly know how to tell you, but I feel your sympathy, so I keep on.

That little boy with the yellow hair was the child of a starving young musician whom I had been able to help — though too late. After a few happy months, when I went to their rooms and we spent long evenings filling ourselves with music, the violinist and his young wife both died. The baby, who weathered the hardships which killed his parents, they left to me.

The memory of those evenings we four spent together I shall never lose. The love of that little family for each other was something of which I always had dreamed, but had never known. Often on my way to a dance I would go there and play their accompaniments while the father played his violin

and the mother sang, and the baby rolled on the floor and loved it all. So I resolved, when I took Guy home, that I would do all in my power to keep the sunlight which was his inheritance always about him. The society world might if they chose — and they did choose — think me an unmitigated crank. When a girl of nineteen blights a social career by devoting all her time and energies to a North End baby, she oversteps the bounds of conventional peculiarity. But I just hugged the baby closer and laughed at the rest of the world. Here was something that needed me! When Guy cuddled in my arms and I looked into his blue eyes, a wave of feeling rose up in me, and that hollow aching space was filled.

You could n't look at that child and think an unworthy thought, or say an unkind thing. Love fairly radiated from him, and every one fell under the magic spell. I could n't bear to be away from him, so I went out very little. But the few dinners and dances I did go

to, I enjoyed, for I was happy. Life had begun to mean something to me. Guy was two years old that first winter, toddling about and beginning to talk. When I was going out to dinner I would dress early so that I might have a good long play with him in the nursery. He loved pretty things, and when I came to him in my evening gown and jewels, he would shout and call me "Lully Tonny!" — Do you know baby talk, I wonder? He loved to play with my rings and necklace and run his soft little fingers over my hands and throat. I remember one night when I wore diamonds in my hair he lay blinking at me, completely fascinated, without saying a word. The pressure of his arms round my neck, and his voice saying, "'Night, Tonny dear," would stay with me through the dinner, and make me happy.

People used to call me unselfish and wonder how I could give up so much for the child. They did n't know that it was n't "giving up."

So it went on for six years. If you have never watched a child grow and develop you don't know what it means. I didn't till I had Guy. I never liked or understood children before. But I followed every step with him, and in his pleasures made up for the childhood I had never known. He was happy at kindergarten and school, for he was receptive to everything good. He loved animals, and he was simply filled with music. He began to sing as soon as he could talk, and before long we sang duets, he standing beside me at the piano in his little white dress. I had to avoid songs like "The drowning of poor pussy-cat," and a minor strain would bring the tears rushing into his eyes. That was the only way in which his inherited delicacy of temperament showed itself. There was nothing abnormal about him. He loved play as much as any child I ever saw, and was full of fun and gayety.

When he was five I began his violin lessons. He showed great talent, and of course

I made all sorts of plans for him. I had ceased completely to dream about myself and to wonder what was likely to become of me. For surely, "It is when one expects nothing more for one's self that one is able to love."

You see, don't you? — that I would have done anything to bring happiness to Guy, given up all to spare him pain. But somehow that which we are ready to give is seldom demanded of us. It was the child himself I must give up, and when suffering came to him I was powerless.

In all my loneliness and grief I feel that I could bear the loss, if that were all. If Guy could have slipped happily away there would always have been a memory of joy and peace to comfort me. But instead, there is that horrible impression of the end which has burnt itself into me. That is what I mean by saying, though I force it from me by day, I dream of it at night. No one but the doctor and nurse realize what happened, but now I will

tell you. People wrote their sympathetic notes, saying that I would find comfort in the thought of Guy's joyous life, that it was beautiful to think I had none but happy memories to recall. This applied to what they knew, but it did not touch the trouble lying nearest my heart.

Guy was taken ill suddenly, and lived only three days. It did n't occur to me that he could die. There never was a creature who seemed more alive in every fibre. The doctor said that an operation might save him, and I had to take the responsibility of that life and say it should be tried. It was unsuccessful. The doctor said the end must come in a few hours. Then my only feeling was to be with Guy so that he should have no fear. The doctor looked troubled and advised me to go out of the room.

" Surely you will not let him suffer ! " I cried out.

" No," he answered. " There is no danger of that, but we are obliged to use powerful

drugs which may have a strange effect. I should advise you not to stay."

His words sounded meaningless at the time. Guy knew me. Guy needed me. I sat beside him, holding his little hot hand and smoothing his forehead. He was contented for I was with him, and I thought he would slip away with his hand in mine.

How can I write what happened — it is all so horrible! "Only a convulsion," the doctor said. "Remember he is unconscious and feels no pain."

How could I believe that, when he struggled in my arms so that I could not hold him, and must give him up to the doctor and nurse, when I saw his face distorted and heard him moan and cry out as though imploring me to help him! Can there be anything harder to bear, I wonder, than helplessly to watch the sufferings of those one loves!

Finally I went into my own room and paced up and down. His cries grew gradually fainter. There was a gasping sound, then at

last it was over. When I came back they had drawn something over his face.

The doctor wished that I might have been spared such a painful experience, but I must remember, he said, that the child was wholly unconscious through it all. He went away thinking me convinced. But do you wonder that what I saw is more real to me than anything he could say? Strive as I will to believe him, it seems to me he was only trying to comfort me. Though I have times of implicitly accepting his words, the dreadful scene will keep coming into my mind, and then the old doubt comes over me again.

"You should not have stayed," the practical nurse said.

I cannot feel that, for at least I did all that I could, and I hope that my face bending over him was Guy's last sight on earth.

I shall never forget the beauty of that June day. You know those lavish days when Nature has more bounty than she knows how to use. There was an overflow of joyous life.

It seemed to me that the birds had never sung with such abandon. The sunlight streaming in at the window made mocking darts at my pink dress. I had put it on because Guy liked it. The whole outer world was expressive of him. I seemed to hear him calling me from the garden, but when I went out there I was met only by a greater loneliness. Even the room with its suffocating odor of drugs was more bearable to me than that riotous joy in which I could not share.

That is what I mean by saying we can derive no direct comfort from Nature. When it is the touch of the hand, the sound of the voice our hearts cry out for, nothing else will satisfy.

So this is my story. Your silence has been so sympathetic that I almost forgot you were n't one of the dear old dumb things I used to pour out my woes to.

It is nearly a day that Sandy and I have been here. The shadows of the pines are

growing long, and Nurse will be wondering what has become of us. We must leave our mountain-top. Perhaps you too are on the lookout from your sky parlor. You will have left the balcony long ago.

So I go down to you — yet we seem much nearer here.

C.

X

DAVID TO CONSTANCE

TUESDAY EVENING.

IF you could have seen me, dear friend, when I read your letter, you would realize my sympathy. The evening has slipped by while I have been reading and pondering it, but I can't let night shut down without sending you a few words. Poor lonely little child with a soul hunger. Indeed, it made me sad to think about her.

You are tired to-night, I know. Your music is delicate and dreamy instead of wild and spirited as it was yesterday. I know that it must have cost you much to write me such a letter. When feelings rush out with such

force it shows how narrowly they have been pent up. It is better that they should at last be free. The pine trees and I will share your burden and keep secret.

Shall I tell you that with all the sympathy, all the compassion that your story roused in me, my chief feeling was of triumph! Be thankful that you have known such love, that you are capable of feeling it, for it means just the difference between real life and hollow existence.

I am glad that I am a doctor, if for no other reason than to reassure you in the matter that has given you such distress. It is hard, I know, to give more credence to what we are told than to what we see with our own eyes. But you must accept the truth from those who have reason to know. I will, if you wish, give you a string of scientific truths which must remove all doubt from your mind. I *know* that Guy felt no pain, and I am glad that you were brave enough to be with him.

I wish I could speak with such assurance

of cases of my own. To alleviate when you can, to try not to think about it when you can do nothing, is a lesson a doctor must early learn. But if he is sympathetic, his heart will have one wrench after another, nevertheless. So knowing what this burden is, I rejoice that you need not bear it.

Here comes Nurse to tuck me up, just as she used to do. I wonder if she will hear me say my prayers, and ask me if I have been a good boy to-day.

Good-night.

D. L.

XI

CONSTANCE TO DAVID

WEDNESDAY.

THAT your letter was a comfort to me you will realize when I tell you that I slept last night as I have not done for months. Consequently the world seems brighter to me this morning in spite of its outwardly forbidding aspect. The doctor said, "What a dreary day!" as he passed by. I could n't agree with him. Yet how the rain does pour down! You can't go out — for which I am very sorry.

My little sitting-room is cosy this morning, with its dancing fire and singing tea-kettle. Next to the purring of a cat, do you

know any sound more comfortable than the singing of a kettle?

When will they let you come down here and visit me, I wonder?

Do you know that, having laid bare my secret before you, I feel more like indulging in a little levity. Having once established my position, I am willing to disregard it. All sorts of puzzling things come to my mind to ask you, but I can't endanger my present peace by doing so.

I have just given your doctor a serious lecture for letting his horse stand uncovered in the rain. I think he will remember another time.

C. N.

XII

DAVID TO CONSTANCE

Wednesday Evening.

WON'T you play the Mendelssohn "Spring Song" again? That was such a tantalizing snatch. I like things out of season, don't you? Now, "Good-by Summer" merely intensifies one's autumnal feelings, which are likely to be strong enough anyway. But a touch of spring brings a happy suggestion of hope and promise, and wood violets.

D. L.

XIII

DAVID TO CONSTANCE

WEDNESDAY EVENING.

THANK you. Do you know that you play very well?

D.

XIV

CONSTANCE TO DAVID

THURSDAY.

THE woods are wet this morning for newly starched white petticoats, so I have abandoned them — the woods, I mean — and have struck out in search of green fields and pastures new. Here is a little hollow which the sun has touched — drying up its moisture, and leaving it fresh and fair. There is, however, an irrepressible little brook which, refusing to be subdued, tumbles by me in its excess of haste and exuberance. It is apparently afraid to pause a moment lest it overflow its banks. From force of childish habit I fling a few twigs into the stream and watch

them until, whisked along by the current, they disappear. I am left to wonder, with the ever new charm of contemplating things vague, where the boats go.

Dear Sage, I am constantly tempted into saying, "If this were all!" If one might forever listen to this musical brook, one might also keep in tune. But oh, the harsh discords to which we may not close our ears! This overflow of feeling Nature — though I have reviled her — does understand. But the world does not. It demands that one be ornamental and agreeable in society, that one make charitable calls, and sign checks. It is a practical, mercenary world, as my morning's mail testifies. While I am abusing it, let me add that it is also selfish, liking us so long as we amuse it, thrusting us aside when we become poor company.

When we are by nature inclined toward melancholy, why does n't Fate — the silly thing — enjoy cosseting us up a bit? Instead, she delights in stripping away the few

healthy influences we have welcomed, and in thrusting us back upon our own poor resources.

You are shocked, doubtless, that on this beautiful morning I can give vent to such heathenish sentiments. It must be the very contrariness which appalls me, and makes all the ugly things of life — other people's troubles, I 'd have you know, as well as my own — loom large. How do you contrive to be triumphant, I wonder.

But I bore you, and you probably have reached the yawning stage. What splendid openings, though, for long lectures I have given you — so take heart!

Sandy is standing on the other side of the brook, urging me to further exploration. So, as I never can refuse a dog — good-by.

I wonder if that tipsy little bridge will bear me.

C. N.

P. S. It did n't!

XV

DAVID TO CONSTANCE

FRIDAY.

AND so I may give you a lecture? —you child who abuse your most faithful ally. If this Arcadian life were all, I would n't dare contemplate the consequences. Call the world selfish, mercenary, what you will — its influences have the blessed power to turn us from ourselves. And is there a more magic balm than that which soothes our own wounds when we are trying to heal other people's? I don't mean, mind you, by giving "absent treatment" to all the sufferers in Christendom.

May I take advantage of my position on

the lecture platform to make another suggestion? If Fate is that vindictive personage you paint, why not disarm her by determining the extent of your own resources? Then — excuse the impertinence to one so august — you would have her on the hip.

I have been tending a flickering flame lately, trying — with Emerson — to "build altars to the Beautiful Necessity." Sometimes my fire is quenched by discouraging rain, and I am left shivering. Then all at once a spark flies out in an unexpected place, and a clear flame shoots up. I believe it will burn brightly in the end. Don't you?

Here is something which has been singing its way into my heart. It may be a trite phrase, but to me it sounds musical: "We must accept the unalterable laws of life."

I wonder if I made it up, or whether I am thrusting second-hand information upon you. That would be unfair.

Does this all sound too severe and pedantic to a dreamer? D. L.

Thank you for your glimpse of green fields and running brooks. I felt that I was playing there with you. Nature must have forgotten her rôle of proud beauty to step down from her pedestal — or was it possibly you who? —

Good-by.

XVI

CONSTANCE TO DAVID

SATURDAY.

YOUR suggestions though delicately veiled are searching, — my gentle critic, — and it is unfortunate that directly one criticises I rebel. I have always felt sure that I could keep quite pleasant if no one ever found fault with me. A humble notion, surely! But it is so healthy to expand under praise that we should be allowed the luxury. Guy and I reveled in each other's approval.

Yes, I suppose I must go back into the world, and take up some practical work. But I rather pity the object of my unwilling devotion.

Is it Goldsmith who says, "Scrub the floor with your broken heart"?

That is undoubtedly good for the heart, but I scarcely think the floor will be greatly benefited.

Do you, who can juggle so nicely with Fate, suppose that by merely filling the hours I can forget? And I don't wish to forget. Another selfish trait which I will score with a black mark to spare you the trouble.

Here am I with the freedom of God's earth at my disposal, complaining, while you, poor prisoner, utter not a word. There is something positively frightening in an uncomplaining man. Does it grow easier when one has accepted the unalterable laws, I wonder? The idea never occurred to me, and you are cheating me of a most absorbing line of thought. I suppose you knew that!

I fancied that my trees had missed me when I went back to them to-day. The pine branches swept before me in stately

curtsies, and the wind sang its tender welcome.

When can you come with me into the woods?

C. N.

XVII

DAVID TO CONSTANCE

SUNDAY.

OF course you don't wish to forget. Memory, dear dreamer, is a precious possession and should be guarded as such. To find a man or a woman who remembers — even great joys — gives one fresh confidence in life's reality.

You know how sadly Amiel says, "Nature is forgetful; the world is almost more so."

I think, however, that he does our fair friend an injustice. Nature is wonderfully discriminating, it seems to me, in what she casts out and what she keeps. Why not look

your affairs squarely in the face and see if you might n't profit by her example?

They are promising me freedom before long. Shall I dare, I wonder, abuse you then? I have to make the most of present opportunities, for already I see the tilt of your nose and the curve of your lips, my lady disdain.

I have a glimpse through the trees of the little white meeting-house on the hilltop where you have gone. The sound of the bells comes clearly to me across the fields. Is it as charming when you reach it, or is it one of those things which never should be approached for fear of marring its perfection? But these are dangerous views to circulate in the enemy's camp!

I wonder if there is a small boy in knickerbockers, who sits with legs stretched straight before him — not long enough even to dangle. Sometimes he nods wearily, and then a gentle mother's arm curves around him, and rest comes. Lucky little beggar! Some day

he may stand outside the church, and long for those old simple days before he tried to set up a philosophy of his own.

Then he will hope that a fair saint within may breathe a prayer for him. Do you think she will?

D. L.

XVIII

CONSTANCE TO DAVID

MONDAY.

I HAVE been reminiscing to-day. There was an insignificant little girl at school, who apparently cared for nothing but finery and frivolity. An unusually fine man fell in love with her, and in marrying him whatever good lay latent in her was developed. For when I met her a few years ago she was wonderfully improved. She has two of the loveliest children I ever saw. Her life is simply flooded with sunshine. And, like many women of her kind, she accepts it all as a matter of course. There is a different type of woman to whom this would be the breath of life, and she is

usually doomed to stand outside and shiver. For example, — a baron once proposed to me after a week's acquaintance, intimating that we could make an excellent bargain, as I would give my riches in exchange for his title. He added, by way of inducement, that there would be no danger of unhappiness, as neither of us was likely to waste a serious thought upon the other.

It was after a few more such depressing experiences that Guy took me into his heart, and I did n't care what became of every marriageable man in Christendom. And then — You know the rest.

Don't ask me to look my affairs squarely in the face, my kind critic. They scowl back at me too disagreeably.

The little church surprised me yesterday. I also had thought of it as a mere picturesque spot in the landscape, and a very peaceful one. I went, and instead of the expected rest was given a stirring-up quite outdoing any I have received at your hands. I had pic-

tured Mr. Dean a placid, middle-aged soul, with no ideas in particular. Presto! a beardless youth, wide awake to all the questions of modern life. You should have heard his voice ring when he urged us not to ignore our blessed privilege in the world as servants of man and children of God.

"You must remember," he said, "that the apparent hardships of life are, in reality, glorious opportunities. Circumstantial pleasures, desirable though they may seem at the moment, are merely outward. They pass and are soon forgotten. It is when this form of pleasure is denied us, when we are thrown upon our own resources, that our characters develop, and inward peace is found."

Here is this man with an invalid wife, two small children, and only a tiny salary, — who has had to leave his work in the slums where, evidently, his power lies, — pouring out his soul Sunday after Sunday to deaf ears. And yet he is happy.

I know what you are thinking — that this

is but another instance of the revelation of joy through sorrow. Is mine the only nature too small to comprehend it, I wonder?

I 'm too bruised and battered to think. I feel like pushing your invincible theories aside, and saying, " Don't bother me — only let me grieve in peace! "

C. N.

XIX

DAVID TO CONSTANCE

OU have set me dreaming to-night. I also have a reminiscence.

When I was in college, and glad to earn a penny now and then, I went West with a youth whose health — not because of overwork — demanded that he leave the Alma Mater for a while. Incidentally he was upset over a girl who, he thought, had treated him badly. His opinion, however, was slightly biased. She merely did n't choose to marry him, and I thought her judgment was excellent.

We were penetrating the wilds of Wyoming by slow degrees, and at each stop where we inquired for some backwoods camp, we

were met with the ready answer, "Oh, Jeff's the man you're lookin' for!"

The form of the reply might vary, but the substance never.

At each apology for a town we were greeted with new accounts of Jeff, and as we drew nearer his domain the stories became more and more personal. At a distance we had learned that he had the most successful lumber camp in the State, that he was the best huntsman and guide for miles around; but near at hand — within fifty miles, that is to say, of his camp — we were made the bearers of all sorts of messages, and even of small gifts for Jeff. The children showed us necklaces, boxes, and all sorts of knickknacks he had carved for them ingeniously out of wood. The most frequent message was, "Tell him to come over. It's weeks since he's been here. We're all pinin' to see him."

As we and our guides, with jaded horses, finished our march before a rude cabin in the wilderness, we were greeted by our host.

Six feet three of manly strength, he towered in the doorway; then he came forward to welcome us with the grace of a woman and the smile of a child. This was indeed Jeff — everybody's friend — but for the rest I was unprepared. He was no backwoodsman — this gentle giant — but a gentleman born and bred.

As we lounged round the camp-fire at night, after a hard day's work, Jeff would refresh us with the tales for which he was justly famous. It was not merely his experiences in themselves, but the spirit he put into them, which made them interesting. Whether his story dealt with the great cities, or the greater wilderness, and he seemed equally at home in either, his keen insight into character and his thoroughly human understanding always struck the keynote. He had the rare faculty of keeping himself out of his stories. It was generally, "A man I met once," or, "A dog I knew."

It was this very unconsciousness of self

which revealed the man's character. I can hear his great voice now, suddenly softening to tell some pathetic incident in a way that would bring the tears to one's eyes. Even the Kid would for the moment forget his own woes. Then, quick as a flash, that humor of his would come to the rescue, and we would all be laughing together.

I think the best tribute to his personality is that he could give a rebuke without its being resented.

One day a forlorn little yellow dog straggled into camp. One of the new men started to drive it out, but Jeff stopped him with a look that, I think, he did n't soon forget, and whistled to the dog.

"Why, hullo, Sporty!" he said, when the little beast came wagging up to him. "I met you down the river road the other day — wondered when you 'd be calling round."

"Oh, beg your pardon!" the man said involuntarily. "Did n't know he was a friend of yours."

I think it was the influence of Jeff's character, as much as the natural life to which it was so closely akin, that proved such a bracing tonic to the Kid. After two months, there was no excuse for our staying longer.

Romantic as it would have been to let the story of Jeff's former life remain in shadowy obscurity, curiosity got the better of me. On our homeward journey I made repeated inquiries among the mutual friends who were all eager to talk of Jeff. At first I could discover nothing. He had lived with them and been their friend. That was all they knew or cared to know. At last I found an old man who — through no act of Jeff's — had learned the story, and accordingly had kept silent.

This is it: Ten years before, Jeff had come to Wyoming from business in one of the big Eastern cities, bringing with him his little boy of five. The doctors had given the child up, finally suggesting, however, that Western air possibly could save or, at least, prolong his life. The character of the mother

was plain to see — one wonders how Jeff could have loved her — in that she chose to remain in the social circle which comprised her life. Roughing it in the wilderness would have been to her slow suicide.

The boy flourished in the outdoor world, and grew steadily stronger. Jeff established himself, and prepared to stay the rest of his life if necessary.

After a few years came the news that his wife had run away with another man, without the formality of procuring a divorce. I, who in these few weeks had learned to know this man as it is not often given us to know our fellow creatures, realized what this blow must have been to him. The smirch on his good name, the careless handling of his honor, must have been hideous to a man of his sensitive and upright nature; but that was not all. I knew that in his simplicity he still loved the woman who had wronged him, and that the bitterest pang was in the loss of her love. This grief he completely concealed,

and kept his bright side out. Toward the men who knew nothing of his history this attitude would not be so hard to maintain, but with the boy it was different. In his mind Jeff had kept fresh the memory of the mother, and so, of course, he kept on talking and asking about her. My old friend said he had constantly heard the question, "What do you suppose mother is doing now? Does she still miss us?" And then urgent requests for "Another story about home."

After six years the boy died. He had been gaining steadily, and died just as Jeff had grown to feel sure that he would live.

"Yes, they 'd had great times together," my friend said slowly. "The little feller was gettin' to know all his father did about the birds and animals, and loved the woods just as he did. He was a boy any father might be proud of, but for Jeff — well, you know him," the old man concluded abruptly.

With primitive directness he realized that there was no need to say more.

At every step we were asked about Jeff, and an affectionate message, and the word that he was coming soon, brightened the face of every questioner.

As we rode away, I looked back toward the stately forest where we had left him standing firm and strong like the trees around him. I remember that the Kid and I smoked in silence long after we had left the last camp behind us.

I feel that there is no wrong in telling you this story, for Harry Jefferson died a year ago, felled by one of his own great pines.

The woman who once was his wife, in my opinion, deserves no clemency.

D. L.

XX

CONSTANCE TO DAVID

TUESDAY.

HOW such a life towers up among the ruins of other lives! — a thing complete and perfect, which I from my dust heap may gaze up at and admire. That to produce quite a different effect upon me was your motive in telling me the story, I fully realize. Rather than be thought stupid, I confess to obstinacy. I shall always persist that some well-equipped people are intended to build towers, while others, incapacitated by inheritance or surroundings, are doomed to have their poor little card-houses come tumbling about their ears. I rather envy those placid souls who

don't try to build at all. To be an unconscious failure must be only less satisfying than to be a conscious success.

You and I will never agree as to the limitation of the individual, so let 's keep on quarreling! Not to-night, however. The story of Harry Jefferson is too fresh in my mind.

The maple trees flaunted crimson banners in my face as I went through the wood-path this morning. I send you a sprig as earnest that you will soon pass that way.

C. N.

XXI

DAVID TO CONSTANCE

TUESDAY EVENING.

YOUR non-builders, whose lot you so envy, must lead the placid existence of Emerson's Bumble Bee, —

> "Seeing only what is fair,
> Sipping only what is sweet."

All very proper for a bumble bee, of course, but personally a larger experience has always seemed more interesting. If I felt a sharp twinge now and then, I should call it a spiritual growing pain, and be glad that I was stretching out a bit.

I have long held a soothing notion that Fate favors the frivolous, — include here your

fortunate school friend if you like, — and that she hesitates to burden them with more than they can bear. "Contrariwise," as Tweedledee says, she must be paying you and me a subtle compliment.

But I am on the borderland of philosophy, so let me hasten to withdraw.

Nurse has come and gone, and the room seems suddenly filled with new light and life. Imagine caring to classify her, or to determine the reason for her cheerfulness. I don't suppose she ever paused to consider the problem of individual destiny — benighted woman!

Has she told you about that crippled child of hers in Boston, whom she visits every month?

D. L.

XXII

CONSTANCE TO DAVID

WEDNESDAY EVENING.

I AM tired—heartily, healthily tired. It is such a different feeling from the negative weariness which has hung about me for so long. Nothing has the power to disturb or hurt me to-night — not even your letter, which was horrid. So I ignore it. Perhaps, however, you considered it the retort courteous to mine.

You remember what I told you of the minister's family? This morning Nurse told me they were in great trouble. The poor young wife was very ill, and the little maid of all work had departed. I won't bore you

with all the household details, for you can readily see that the situation was critical.

So I pinned on a hat, and ran up the road. I found the minister employed clearing away the breakfast dishes. Two small children sat on the floor playing with their dolls and blocks, patiently trying to make the best of an unfortunate situation. The first hasty glance gave me the impression that they had been scrambled into their clothes by unaccustomed hands. It is odd that a few hours of neglect can produce an effect of such utter forlornity.

We had a busy morning! Mr. Dean, very red in the face, tried at first to bow me out of the scene of confusion and into his study. He tried cheerfully to assure me that there was nothing to do, as he could perfectly well put the house in order and take care of the children himself. Judging by appearances, I could scarcely agree with him. He told me with tears in his eyes that it was owing to Mrs. Martin that his wife had lived through

the night. I could hear Nurse's step and cheery voice upstairs, and knowing that the really critical part was best trusted to her, I devoted myself to the simpler tasks below. For I had suddenly discovered latent executive ability, and was charmed with the new sensation of putting it to active use.

So I tied a big checked apron round the minister's neck, for he was spotting his clothes dreadfully, buttoned myself into another, and we dispatched the dishes in short order. The children, who like all of their kind are easily cheered if you can only divert them, brightened up immediately.

While the little boy was playing he was a steam-engine, however, and pursuing his way round and round the table, he suddenly doubled up in apparent agony.

"I fink somethin's the matter wid my clo'es," he gasped. "They stick into me — here."

Poor little monkey! Examination revealed that they were put on — the under ones —

wrong side out, and all those many buttons were pressing inward.

The poor minister was overcome at the discovery, and was forced to admit that he was not a success as nurse. I discharged him from that position and sent him to his rightful one in the study. Then I worked a transformation, surprising to myself, in the children's appearance, and we went outdoors to play. We had such a beautiful time, and it was all a surprise to me. I never supposed other children would like me. But they enjoyed just the things Guy did. We picked flowers and watched the birds, and soon we were old friends.

Nurse cooked luncheon for us. I was glad to be helped in that very practical task, and we all had a merry meal together, for she brought word that Mrs. Dean was comfortable, and that the minister might go and sit with her for a little while.

As it grew dusk, I told the children stories, and they loved them just as Guy did,

even liking his favorites best. One about an enchanted princess in a wood, they asked for over and over. Then somehow or other I began telling them all about Guy himself, and you should have seen their faces. They wanted to hear everything I could tell them, and kept asking the dearest questions. Little Lucy was "so sowwy he 'd gone away where she could n't play wid him."

I did n't leave them till they were tucked up in bed for the night. Then they put their arms round me and would n't let me go till I promised to come again in the morning.

"Early?" Jackie asked. "Shall we wake up an' find you here?"

I came flying home as though my feet had wings. The moon was up, the stars were shining, and the world seemed flooded with golden light.

And, oh, I 'm going again to-morrow!

C. N.

XXIII

DAVID TO CONSTANCE

THURSDAY.

WHEN you went springing by before the dew was off the grass, I knew that you had some definite work to do. When you came singing home in the starlight, I knew that the work was done. And yet, my lady, I am no mind reader.

So my poor old letters are henceforth to be ignored! I can retaliate and write you no more, which reminds me, oddly enough, that to-morrow I am to be allowed a short walk, and Saturday to be given my freedom. It is merely out of courtesy to the doctor that I have so long submitted to this régime, for

I've felt as strong as an ox since the first few days, and as soon as they let me out I shall prove it.

Then will you let me explore all the wood paths with you? And then we'll climb our mountain peak.

So — Auf Wiedersehen.

D. L.

XXIV

CONSTANCE TO DAVID

On Pine Mountain,
Friday.

HERE I am once more among the dear restful trees. Since Tuesday I have been too busy to come. Think of that — too busy! I repeat the words, for their sound pleases me.

Now I am on my way home from the Parsonage, — by rather a roundabout route, you may think, — and Sandy and I are picnicking under our favorite pine. He is taking his after-dinner nap now, though in a most apologetic way. You should see him with one sleepy eye blinking at the birds that are flying so trustingly near him, and one ear alert to

catch the first sound of my voice. He wishes me to understand that he is sleeping merely for lack of better employment, and awaits my slightest command. Dear old thing! There is something pathetic to me in the whole-souled devotion of these creatures whom man condescendingly calls "the lower animals."

Somehow I don't feel that drowsiness which usually follows a meal in the open air. Of course I have been day-dreaming — but you don't disapprove of practical dreams, do you?

Our good friend's "journal" lies beside me where I can dip into it at will, and I have just happened upon a passage which appeals to me — "Reverie is the Sunday of thought." And he goes on to speculate upon the equal merits of work and consequent repose.

Don't question my right to this earned tranquillity, will you? — for I am reveling in the new sensation.

We have established a trained nurse at the Parsonage. Dear little Mrs. Dean is improving, and the doctor actually says that if she can go to Boston later, and have special treatment, she may get well.

My head is simply full of plans — definite, sensible plans which must succeed, for the minister will sacrifice even his pride where his wife's welfare is concerned. It will be perfectly possible, I know, to slide her stretcher onto a wagon, and then into the baggage car, and I keep thinking of new ways of simplifying the journey.

I can't quite decide whether to have flowery paper in the nursery and plain furnishings, or plain pink paper and coverings of flowered chintz. Which do *you* prefer? That is the day nursery, of course. It is a lovely, bright room. I remember just how the sun used to shine on Guy's hair and turn it to gold. Jackie shall have his room, with his little brass bedstead, and I shall furnish my dressing-room with a white set for Lucy.

Then the best part of all is that the minister will have to come to Boston to be with his family, and then he can take up his beloved slum work again. It seems idiotic of the doctors ever to have sent Mrs. Dean here. I suppose they thought it would be a pleasant place to die in.

It is less than two weeks since I first wrote you from among these pines. This is just such a day of blue sky and clear air — and yet what a difference! Think of sitting in this fairyland and talking of brass bedsteads and house cleaning! You should feel encouraged, my patient teacher. Have I lifted up the latch, I wonder? At any rate, Nature is standing on the threshold, smiling at me.

And so you are to be given your freedom! I told Sandy, and he barked for joy. I whispered it to the trees, and they stretched out their arms in welcome.

A big black cloud is hovering over us! We must fly.

Till to-morrow, then!

C. N.

III

"LIGHT BETWEEN THE TREES"

"LIGHT BETWEEN THE TREES"

I

"NATURE weeps at night and smiles in the morning," Constance said.

"Because she is obeying a natural law of change," David answered.

They stood by the cottage door, sniffing, like young animals, the exhilarating air which swept over them. Before them, field and upland stretched away to the encircling hills. A blue haze lingered there, and the clouds which crowned the hills were soft and white. Nature, indeed, had wrought over night one of her marvelous transformations. The storm had passed and the earth lay basking in the warm October sunshine. It was a mellow day, when the sun seemed to penetrate the

very heart of Nature, making all living things glow in response.

David laughed at Nurse Martin and Constance, who insisted upon wrapping him up and depositing him in a sunny corner of the garden.

"But after all," he told Constance, gayly, "if I am sensible I will submit to playing the invalid, since that is the evident way to gain your society."

He was so absorbed in watching her as she sat beside him with her sewing, her bright hair touched by the sun and tossed by the wind, that although he noted the sound of her voice, her words passed at first, unheeded.

"Oh!" he laughed, as her eyes sought his questioningly. "What is there to tell? I believe I grew up in such a commonplace way that I was scarcely conscious of the process. To be one of a family of seven isn't conducive to personal consideration. I hadn't even the distinction of being the eldest or the

youngest, but was tucked away and lost sight of in the middle."

"Nurse has been telling me things," Constance said wisely.

"What dreadful truths has she revealed?"

"Quite the opposite of dreadful."

"And you believed her? Why, you yourself pronounced her partial!"

"She told me," Constance pursued, "that after you had worked and worked through college and the medical school, you at last gained a splendid practice, you were a rising young doctor, then you" —

"Yes, then I flunked," Leighton interrupted, "and that was the end of all my fine hopes. You see mine was a different variety of disappointment from yours, but they are all alike in the grasp they try to take. We have to decide pretty quickly whether they shall throw us or we them. I always thought it must be uncomfortable to be the under dog, so I 've avoided the position."

"You speak lightly," Constance said,

leaning toward him. "You would have avoided mentioning it entirely. And think how I have babbled on like a running brook!"

"The brook must have its outlet," David answered. "I profited by being the still lake."

"You have a faculty of taking advantage of your opportunities — quite refreshing to me."

"A mere matter of necessity, I assure you. As you have n't had this helpful training, what you have learned reflects more credit on yourself."

"You have taught me much."

"And I could have taught you nothing if you had n't been — as you are. I was reading just the other day, 'Man kann nur demjenigen geben, der einem schon etwas Gleiches entgegenbringt.'"

"Which in plain English means: 'We can give our ideas to people only when they meet them with something similar.' Yes, I

like that. What a good, convincing way they have of putting things."

"You care for German, then?"

"I love it dearly. It must be that the something in me which distrusts French vivacity responds to German sturdiness."

"What a serious child it is!" the man said quizzically. "Because a thing is gay, need it necessarily be false?"

"Quite the contrary. I confess to a weakness for a light veneer of gayety as protection for something underneath. But so often one digs down and finds — nothing."

"Perhaps you were n't digging for the right thing. One is n't likely to find gold in a coal mine, or diamonds in gold fields — but that does n't disprove the excellent qualities of either."

Constance laughed softly.

"There is no need to dispute you this morning," she said. "It is all so satisfying."

She turned from him with a sweeping, all-inclusive gesture.

The man looked across the sunny meadows to the veiled hills, then back at the girl's face, and there his eyes rested.

"Completely satisfying," he answered.

"Is n't it odd!" Constance added slowly, "that the more one can say to a person the easier it is to keep silent. A hundred ideas come popping into my head that you and I might discuss, but with them the comfortable feeling that it is n't necessary."

A quick look of sympathy flashed across the man's face.

"The fact that we are both so contented here is a stronger bond than words could make," he said. "And yet I like to hear your voice," he suggested a little later.

He had lain quiet for several moments, with eyes closed, while Constance bent over her sewing.

"When *I* was a little boy," he resumed, for no answer came, "they used to tell me not to use my eyes in the sun."

"What ingratitude!" gasped Constance.

"Indoors it *is* shady. I take the hint" — and gathering up her work, she darted from him toward the house.

In her flight, her work basket fell to the ground, and spools and thimble rolled under David's chair. Before she could reach them he had sprung and picked them up.

"You can't play any such trick on me," he laughed, as Constance tried to regain her property. "You thought it an excellent pretext to run away and leave me, did you?"

Constance admitted the deceit.

"I call that a cruel way to treat an invalid."

"Nurse and I are going to change places at twelve. She comes back here to get your dinner, and I go to the Deans. Come — if you'll give back my thimble I'll finish my sewing here and then fly."

David was balancing the thimble on his little finger, and studying the contents of the work-box.

"There is something very attractive about

little things like these," he said musingly. "I suppose it's because they are so essentially feminine. Do you know, if I were to come into a strange house, and find a sewing-basket open on the table, I should immediately feel at home."

"Sewing does seem a natural attribute of woman, and yet unfortunately it is an acquired habit with me," Constance sighed. "And I have always wondered how far it is wise to cultivate uncongenial tastes."

"Do you think your powers lie in some other direction?"

"I hope so. It seems as though I must have some gift for the artistic, when I am so utterly stupid in the practical."

"What a woman's argument!" laughed the man. "But if the comment is not wholly irrelevant, it seems to me that you sew very well."

"This is simple work. Just an apron for Lucy, to save her few frocks."

"It looks wonderfully intricate to me."

"I should have heartily agreed with you a little while ago. Now I can afford to make light of it, for it is done — actually done."

Constance waved the small checked apron triumphantly in the air.

"You are going to leave me?" the man asked. "Where is your soft-heartedness?"

With hands thrust deep in his pockets, he was strolling back and forth in the sunny corner of the garden.

"If you 're going away, I 'm going with you."

"No, not to-day. I 've pampered you enough for one morning. Women have an illogical way of spoiling men, then blaming them for making selfish husbands. You see when I am firm with you I 'm considering the future happiness of some fair unknown."

Constance flushed with remorse the moment the words were spoken. But he had looked deceptively strong and independent as he stood before her.

"I 'm not likely to become any one's husband," Leighton answered with his usual directness, "so I don't need such careful training. However, if you insist, let me escort you to the gate."

"I feel so important!" Constance laughed, "being actually needed in two places at once."

"I 'm getting jealous of those Deans," David grumbled.

Constance was looking down the road.

"I see Nurse coming," she said, "so I 'm not so necessary after all."

The man, however, apparently held a different opinion.

"When are you coming home?" he asked, leaning over the gate. "You must n't take that lonely road after dark, even with Sandy."

"How silly! I submit, however, as I was intending to come at supper-time."

"I shall be on the lookout from my sky parlor."

When Nurse Martin came into the garden, some moments later, she found her patient at

the gate, watching a white speck vanishing in the distance.

"I was hoping she might look back at the bend of the road," he explained.

II

THEY had climbed the winding path, and were resting among the great trees on top of Pine Mountain.

"Have we been here before together, or have we all our lives dreamed of coming?" Constance said slowly.

"It does seem part of a half-forgotten dream," David answered. "I suppose it's the piny smell. But let's make no explanations. Let's be part of this fairyland, and fall under its enchantment."

He looked up into the trees where the gray squirrels were springing lightly from branch to branch.

"Perhaps we played together like that thousands of years ago," he said lazily.

Constance was sitting at the foot of a great

pine. She had tossed aside her wide-brimmed hat to rest her head comfortably against the broad trunk, and the sunlight fell in bright patches on her hair.

"It's all changed to gold again," David said.

He flung himself on the ground among the dry leaves and pine needles, and stared upward through the waving treetops.

"What Skimpoles we all are!" he laughed, "with our 'positive talent for lying on our backs and gazing up at the sky.'

"And this is where you and Sandy picnicked?" he asked presently.

The dog, who was still Constance's devoted follower, raised his head and wagged his tail gently at the sound of his name.

"Yes, I seem to know it all," David resumed. "Just as though I really had been here with you. There is the fallen pine whose lot you so envied."

"What a stupid wish that was!" Constance cried. "Life may be sad, but oh, it is beautiful!"

David, with chin propped on his hand, was watching every changing expression of the girl's brilliant, sensitive face.

"Beautiful," he echoed.

She turned from him to gaze dreamily into the depths of the cool green trees.

"What are you thinking about?" he asked.

"Of the enchanted princess who lived in the wood."

"And was this the wood?"

"I think so. At least it was yesterday, when I told the children the story."

"Oh, yes, you were to 'finish it to-morrow,' I remember."

"No, not to finish it—just to tell some more. That is the charm of making up stories for children. They never really finish, even with that conclusive but delightfully indefinite, 'And so they lived happily together forever after.' Next day comes the old request, 'Tell some more about the enchanted princess.' And it makes no difference that

the prince has found her and waked her with a kiss. One must go back again and make up new adventures. And all sorts of delightful possibilities filled my head as I looked into the woods just now."

David nodded sympathetically.

"It is Guy's story, you know, invented for him, and I thought it died with him. Is n't it wonderful to find that faculties are not lost, only slumbering — waiting to be stirred!"

"Tell some more about the enchanted princess," David urged. "Once upon a time" —

Constance leaned back against the tree-trunk and half closed her eyes.

"Once upon a time, then, a beautiful maiden slept on a mossy bank in the midst of a dense forest. And her reflection was mirrored in a crystal lake. She was folded in a royal robe, and on her shining hair was a jeweled crown. A pile of gold glittered at her feet. But he could not win her, who

sought only her riches. Her good fairy had beset the way thither with such difficulties that it could be found only by one virtuous, unselfish, and brave."

"And did such a one appear?"

"After long ages. Each midsummer's day the princess would wake and ask the fairy, 'Has my rightful lord come to claim me?' And the fairy would make answer, 'Not yet, but there is a way for him who will follow it. Some have lost it through cowardice, some through cruelty, many through lack of perseverance. Fair lady, do you desire to wed with such as these?'

"'No,' answered the princess, 'I will await the coming of my true knight.'

"And again she would fall into deep slumber.

"At last, after long hardship and sacrifice, one who had set forth in the courage of youth stood on the border of the crystal lake. But just as he would have leapt into the water to swim to the mossy bank and

claim the princess, he caught sight of his own reflection — that of an old man, gray, bent, and wrinkled.

"'Alas!' he cried. 'Whosoever wakes the princess she must marry, and it were sin for her to wed with such as I. But, before I turn back, I will look upon her once, that I may remember her all my days.'

"So saying, he plunged into the icy water. On the farther shore he turned to look once again at his reflection. Gray hair and wrinkles had disappeared. He was young and handsome as when he set forth upon his journey.

"Joyfully he sprang up the mossy bank — gazed long and rapturously at the sleeping princess, scarcely daring to wake her — then at last he sank on his knees and tenderly kissed her.

"The princess slowly opened her eyes. 'Has my true knight?' — she began to ask. Then she saw the prince smiling down upon her, and in her own eyes was no fear or wonder — only a great peace.

"'You have come at last,' she murmured. 'It is for you I have long waited.'

"And he folded her in his arms. Then"—

"Ah, let us stop there," interrupted David. "That is such a good place to leave them."

Constance laughed.

"And you don't care to know that they lived happily forever after? Evidently you don't like the story as the children do."

"On the contrary, they can't begin to like it as I do. Do you really tell them this same story?"

"Almost the same," Constance answered rather dreamily. "One naturally varies a little to suit one's hearers, don't you think so? I suppose I tell the children more of adventure and you more of— Why, how late it's getting. You know we promised to be prompt at luncheon."

"What do you tell me more of?" asked David.

"Suppose we run down the mountain on the other side," Constance suggested.

"Have you ever done it?"

"Never."

"Have you an idea where it leads?"

"Not the least."

"Then let's do it!"

From the mountain-top they looked down upon Constance's toy village, and the winding river which flowed through it. Then, like two children, they caught hold of hands, and ran laughing down the mountain side.

In the valley below they paused for breath.

"What do you tell me 'more of'?" David demanded.

But Constance only laughed at him, and said that they must hurry home.

III

WONDER if there are two saddle horses to be found in the village," Leighton asked one day at dinner.

"Two?" Constance queried.

"Yes — two. You ride, of course?"

"I guess Si Fletcher's got two prime ones over 't the Red Farm," their host volunteered.

"Don't you take his word for it, Master David," Nurse Martin interposed, beaming across the table as she spoke. "He don't know a saddle horse from a Jersey cow."

"Well, I 'd probably find one as agreeable to ride as the other," her husband admitted. "But Fletcher has got two good uns just the same. Don't you recollect, Nancy, how he

bought 'em for that high-falutin daughter of his, so she would n't be lonesome when she come home from college? Well, he got her a man to ride with — What do you call him? — A groom? An' that girl had no sooner got the hang of ridin' than off they scooted one dark night — eloped, mind you! Si found the horses next mornin' twenty miles away, down by the Barret Station, where the couple had skipped into the train for Boston. He 's never forgiven 'em, so he 's had the horses on his hands ever since."

"Steve, I don't think that 's a nice story to tell these young folks," his wife objected.

"Oh, I don't believe there 's anythin' catchin' in it," Martin answered. "I guess the horses are safe as any others for that matter."

They were all laughing merrily as they pushed back their chairs and rose from the table. In fact, laughter was a frequent guest at these simple kitchen meals which Con-

stance and David agreed were more delightful than any dinner they had ever attended.

Constance had tied a checked apron around her waist, and was bustling about the kitchen with an air of importance worthy of Nurse Martin herself.

"You busy people put me to shame," David called from the doorstep.

He and Steve were enjoying that sense of rest which belongs to the noon hour on the farm. The smoke from their pipes drifted lazily through the open doorway.

"I'm off to the Red Farm," he called a little later, "to get those eloping horses."

They rode together all that glorious afternoon, through red and gold woods, dappled with sunshine, or out upon open stretches of rolling green. And always beyond — ever changing in aspect with the changing shadows, from gray to blue, and from blue to purple — stood the silent hills.

In the rough wood paths the horses, with

heads bent, picked their way daintily among fallen trees and treacherous holes. Here their riders, letting the reins hang loose, talked — sense or nonsense, as they felt inclined. Out on the open road where the horses flung their heads in air and broke into a swinging canter, their riders, abandoning themselves to the joy of motion, fell into happy silences.

After a mad gallop over a smooth bit of road they drew rein sharply at the top of a steep hill.

"Oh, how glorious!" Constance cried. "It almost consoles one for the lack of wings."

The color flamed in her cheeks and her eyes shone. She put her hand to her hair, which had fallen in soft confusion in her neck.

"That last wild plunge was too much for my poor old topknot," she laughed. "We must stop for repairs."

The man, nothing loath, turned in his saddle and watched her seriously.

"I always wondered how you got all those little puffs and coils," he said.

"It's very simple," the girl answered lightly. "You pat it here, and poke it there. Oh, dear!" Her horse had stamped an impatient foot, and a rattling sound on the stones below announced the sudden descent of her hairpins.

David slipped to the ground, and picked up the fallen property.

"That's the way," Constance told him, as he handed the pins to her one by one. "Those little ones first. Now the big shell — no, the dark one. Oh, it's broken! — No wonder. Now the combs. That's it — first one, then the other. You make a very good lady's maid."

She looked laughingly into his eyes, then as suddenly looked away.

With a deft pat she smoothed the last unruly lock into place, all except a few reckless curls around her forehead, which refused to be restrained.

"Are you waiting for me?" she asked presently, for the man had not stirred. "I 'm ready."

He withdrew his eyes abruptly, and turned away from her.

"I was n't — waiting," he answered. Then he grasped the horses firmly by their bridles, and helped them make the sharp descent of the hill.

How strong he looked! Constance thought as she watched his broad shoulders and well-set head. Now he pressed back against her horse, now against his own to steady them as they lost footing for a moment on the rolling stones! The descent had brought them into a quiet valley. Above them, Pine Mountain loomed black against the sky. Below them, undulating meadows swept far away to the eastward. He came closer to her, and rested his hand on her horse's neck. She quivered with the consciousness that the caress was for her.

For a moment the little group stood in

silence. The horses with ears delicately pricked were gazing off at the peaceful landscape, as though seeking some sign of life.

At last, impelled against her will, Constance's eyes met David's, her own dark with suppressed feeling. His fingers closed over her hand as it lay idle upon the pommel.

"And so it has come," he said gently. "It had to come, you know."

For an instant they remained thus. Then with the instinct of the captured creature Constance turned from him, and drew her hand away. When she spoke, it was in a faint voice, unlike her own.

"You speak as though you thought I cared," she whispered.

The light leaped into the man's eyes. "I don't think!" he answered. "I know! Listen!" he went on, before she could answer. "It is n't Constance North, the cold woman of the world, and David Leighton, practical man of affairs, confessing love for each other.

We 've left those outer shells way behind us, down there somewhere. It 's our real selves, the selves that have grown and expanded up here in the warm sunlight and the pure air, that are speaking out. Have n't you felt all along how we 've been drawing nearer and nearer — until at last" —

Still the woman's pride held her in leash.

"You take my love for granted," she murmured. "No man has ever done that."

"I 'm sorry," David answered whimsically, "that I compare so unfavorably with your other experiences. Perhaps it 's lack of practice. You 're the only woman I ever loved.

"Why, it was inevitable!" he added quietly, as Constance did not speak. "God just put us here in the sunshine, and made us love each other. I suppose the first man and the first woman felt the same way."

In Constance's mind arose the image of men and women who had loved throughout the ages. Some had married and had lived

in peace together; others Fate had kept apart. These last, in sad procession, seemed to pass before her.

"What are we going to do about it?" she asked tremulously.

The man smiled. Then she saw that she had broken down the barrier which she had struggled to hold, and that her love stood confessed.

"Do about it?" David cried. "I intend to be as insanely happy as any man has a right to be who has won a good woman's love. I'm going to keep it and cherish it. It will be the ruling passion of my life" — His voice broke. "As long as I live," he added slowly.

Constance looked down into his upturned face, at the blazing eyes, the strong chin, and resolute mouth. His spirit swayed hers, and made her share his exaltation. It was not a time for questioning, for trying to fathom the future. In that vivid moment she realized that it was part of the order of their life on

the mountain peak that they should conceal nothing, that her love should answer his.

David's head was bowed against her knee, and she rested her hands upon it.

"You have come at last," she said softly, and unconsciously she used the words in the fairy tale. "I have always waited for you."

Their horses moved uneasily. The sun had slipped behind the hills, and the twilight breeze was cool. The pines rose dark against a background of glowing red.

David leapt into the saddle, and they set forth at a gallop, with faces turned toward the light.

IV

AND it is all coming out beautifully," Constance was saying. "It will all be so simple!"

"Simple, my dear, because you have arranged it so perfectly," Mrs. Dean answered warmly.

She could not raise her head from the couch, but she smiled into Constance's eyes, and pressed the cool fingers which clasped hers.

"Everybody writes so encouragingly," Constance continued. "They all seem to understand just what I mean. I've only to make the final arrangements when I go to town Thursday, then we shall send for you, and then" — Constance ran on, unfolding her plans as she had done in her letter to David that day on Pine Mountain.

Mrs. Dean said little, but watched in quiet contentment the animated face so close to hers. It had been an exciting afternoon at the parsonage, with the unusual festivity of two visitors at tea, and now she was content to lie back among her pillows and listen. Presently steps sounded upon the stairs.

"There come those men!" Constance exclaimed, "to interrupt us."

Then her name was called and she went swiftly into the hall.

"There are two small people up above," announced the minister, "who refuse to go to sleep until a certain lady has kissed them good night."

"We've done our best to make up," David affirmed, "but they still foolishly persist that they want you."

He leaned back against the wall to let Constance pass him on the narrow staircase, and they smiled into each other's eyes.

"One of those childish fancies," Constance laughed as she brushed lightly by him. "And

to think that we 're just as important to them as our grown-ups used to be to us ! "

A little later she came down among them, her hair tumbled and her cheeks glowing. " It 's good to be loved," she said. Apparently she spoke to the fire which the minister was stirring, for the October twilight was cool. David, however, sitting by Mrs. Dean's couch, heard and flushed in the darkness.

Presently when they rose to go, Mrs. Dean drew the girl's head down to hers upon the pillow.

" God bless you, dear, and give you courage," she whispered.

The minister went with them to the door. As he helped Constance with her wrap he tried to form a polite phrase of gratitude, but he stumbled hopelessly.

" Take care ! " the girl laughed. " You 're putting me into the wrong sleeve." Then their fingers met in an understanding clasp.

He pulled David's coat into place, as pretext for resting his hand a moment on the

man's shoulder. "No need to say good-by to *you*," he said. "We 'll see each other again."

"Of course," David answered heartily. It was easier not to face the truth.

Their host lingered on the threshold. "Won't you have a lantern?" he asked, peering out into the dusk.

"No — thanks," David called from the path. "The moon will soon be up."

The door closed and the patch of light in which they had stood faded. There was a frosty breath in the air. David settled his chin firmly into his coat collar, and set out with a resolute swing. The road stretched before them, a gleaming strip of white, and their footsteps rang out with sharp distinctness as they followed it in silence. Once David asked if the pace were too rapid, and Constance, unwilling to admit defeat, answered that it was not. But at the stile where they left the main road for a short cut through the birch woods her breath came unevenly. She

paused, then hurried her steps to follow the dark figure striding on before her.

"Look out for the rough places!" the man said over his shoulder. But at that moment she tripped on a stone, stumbled, and fell.

He was at her side in an instant, but when he would have drawn her to her feet, she slipped back against the rock where she had fallen.

"Just let me sit still a moment," she begged.

"Constance!" he cried, bending over her. "What is it? Why, you 're crying!"

"Yes," she answered vaguely, "I 'm crying. I don't know why."

"I know," he groaned. "I 've tired you out — I 'm a beast — I did n't realize" —

He knelt beside her, making little dabs at her cheeks with his handkerchief, but they were all ineffectual to stem the torrent.

"No," Constance murmured. "It was n't that. It was like Fate — following blindly on and on — not being able to stop. All those

silent years to come seemed to stretch before me." She pressed her hand against her side. "And that lonely feeling," she whispered.

"Lonely?" he asked. "Why, we were together, dear."

"Were we? But you seemed so far away. It was n't the real you — that big still thing towering above me."

For an instant she clung to him like some wild thing seeking shelter, but there was no response in his touch, and she drew away.

"How can you bear it?" she asked wonderingly.

"What?" he answered huskily, because he could think of nothing better to say.

She winked away the tears impatiently.

"Oh! all — all," she cried, stretching out her arms. "Seeing other people's homes, then being shut out into the darkness — caressing other people's children, and knowing that you will never" — Her voice broke.

"Dear child it 's different with us," the man said. Kneeling, his face was on a level

with hers, but still he did not touch her. "This has been a wonderful experience — perfect — a thing by itself — four weeks out of all eternity spent together. Don't hurt it by wishing it different."

"Oh!" the girl cried passionately. "If you *care*, how can you say that? You make an episode of it — something without past or future. To be real it must have its roots in our very being, and it must go on — and on."

"It will," the man answered, "but in our own way, not in the usual way of the world. Listen, dear."

"No, no!" the girl protested. "Don't speak of that negative, colorless form of happiness that we have to make for ourselves when we can't get the other. Oh! I 'm weary of subterfuge — of trying to persuade myself that I can do without what other women have. Weary — weary of it, I say."

Her head fell forward against her knees, and for a few moments there was silence. It

was the man's brief touch upon her hair which roused her.

"Constance," he began gently. But she drew away, and in her eyes was a hard glitter which he could not bear to see. She seemed scarcely to notice him.

"Must the cup always be dashed from my lips just as I am about to drink?" she whispered.

David groaned. The sound arrested her, and she looked at him sadly.

"I know what you're thinking," she said slowly, "that we've been granted something which comes to few people. I know it. But I would choose the old, usual way. I can't be of much use to the world in general, but to love" —

The man caught at a straw desperately.

"You *can* be of use," he said. "Think what you have done!"

"Yes, you have buoyed me up with some unnatural power. Yesterday, when I knew that you loved me, I climbed to your height

for a little while. I 've been full of helping the Deans to-day — but it could n't last. See how it has left me."

She stretched out her hands, and they were limp and nerveless.

" Strength will come to you," David said gravely, " if you demand it."

" And what is strength? Is n't it possible to confuse the strength which can renounce with the weakness which lacks the power to hold? It 's so simple to give up when one is indifferent. It 's a question, *I* say, of how much one cares. Perhaps you "— She broke off with a nervous little laugh. " Oh! I 'm absurd," she cried, " unmaidenly — laying bare these poor tattered feelings. But it 's a woman 's way to hold desperately to what she believes to be hers. A man can put aside and forget."

David sprang to his feet.

" Constance, you can't think that?" he cried, " when you know that we have touched the real — you and I, together."

"What is real, I wonder?" the girl said musingly. "Look!"

She had risen and turned from him. David's eyes followed the direction in which she was pointing. A white trail of mist was shrouding the land. In its clinging folds the outlines of valley, hill, and sky were indistinguishably blended; and partly obscured by a filmy veil the moon gleamed coldly.

"Look at Pine Mountain!" Constance cried, "looming like a spectral thing. You can't tell where its peak stops, and where the clouds begin. You think you are looking at something substantial, and it fades away into nothing. That is the way with — life."

"Don't, dear," David begged, going to her side. "Everything is weird and fantastic to-night. Come home."

Her eyes met his, unseeingly at first, but suddenly life came back to them, and a new expression, indicating a swift change of mood, flashed across her face. She sprang from him toward a clump of white birches

which stood slim and silent in the moonlight. In her dark cloak, her figure was clearly outlined against the pale tree-trunk. The white scarf which she wore about her head had slipped to her shoulders, and the light caught the shining tints in her hair, turning it — as David loved to see it — to gold.

The instincts prompting this action were not the finest in her nature, yet neither did they imply a feeling essentially unworthy. Hers was but the elemental desire, latent in all animal nature, to attract and to hold.

"Look at me, David!" she cried, flinging back her head, and with the motion her throat gleamed like a round white column in the light. "*I* am real — alive in every fibre — the woman you love!"

For a moment the man watched her in silence. His face was stern and set. Then he went to her, drew the scarf over her hair, and tied it with firm fingers.

"We must go," he said.

Suddenly he turned from her shaken by a

spasm of coughing, violent and uncontrollable.

All at once Constance became aware that the white mist, creeping gradually nearer, was closing in around them. She sprang to his side, and snatching the scarf from her head, wrapped it around his neck.

"Fool!" she cried to herself bitterly. "Selfish fool! Shall I ever learn, I wonder?"

She slipped her hand under his arm to support him. To help him was her one desire.

The paroxysm of coughing over, he would have given back the scarf, but she refused to take it, and instead drew it protectingly across his mouth.

"And you don't object to walking with an animated ghost?" he asked quizzically.

"Don't talk, dear child, in the dampness," she begged.

"But I want to be sure you're with me before we set out upon this sea of dreams."

She felt that he was fumbling for her hand, and she slid it into his. In silence they walked home together.

At the doorway stood Nurse Martin, peering anxiously into the darkness.

"You are late, children dear," she called, "but there 'll be a hot supper ready for you in a minute."

And she drew them into the light and warmth.

V

THEY were sitting on the sunny porch together — the minister and his wife. It was the first time in many weeks that the invalid had been out of doors, and the crisp air was bringing back the color to her cheeks.

"I don't know," she said musingly, as though resuming a former thread of conversation, "whether it's the freedom from responsibility, or the thought that I shall soon be well, that makes me so happy. No," she added, sudden radiance dawning in her face, "it's the knowledge that some one *cares* — that it makes a real difference to some one whether we fall under our burdens or have a chance to rise and take up our lives again."

The minister, gazing off toward the shad-

owy hills, had been silently planning his farewell sermon to his people, and yet he was quite conscious also of his wife's words. He was leaning lightly upon the arm of her chair, and now he turned and pressed her hand.

"Do you know," Mrs. Dean went on slowly, "when she first made the offer to us, and I feared that with that dreadful pride of yours you would refuse it, my anxiety was n't so much for us as for her. I felt that it was the one thing that could save her. She 's the sort of woman who must pour out her soul on some one."

"I know," her husband answered. "And as soon as I realized it, that demon pride was put to rout. Tell me," he added slowly, "did she say anything to you about their — plans?"

"Only that they would go down to Boston together to-morrow, that she would go to her house and arrange about the refurnishing for us, and that he would leave immediately for the West. His mother and

sister are waiting for him in Colorado, you know. She told me just that yesterday, when you and he were upstairs, and it seemed more as if she thought I would like to know, than that she wished to talk about it."

The minister nodded. "It was the same with him," he said reminiscently.

"And they ask no advice, and need none," his wife said. "Oh, they are wonderful!"

"They have learned what the Master meant," her husband answered dreamily, "when he said, 'If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.'"

But the woman's thoughts were on temporal things.

"Oh, think of the years — the empty years — they will be in the same world, breathing the same sunny air" — she stretched out her arms to it — "and yet not together!"

"'For whosoever will save his life shall lose it, and whosoever will lose his life for

my sake, shall find it,'" murmured the minister.

His thoughts were still weaving themselves into the sermon.

There was a shout from outside. The children, ruddy and glowing with exercise, were playing together on the lawn.

"I'm a polo bear!" called Lucy, "and Jackie's a hippypottymus, and he's trying to climb onto my cake of ice!"

Tears rushed into the mother's eyes, for she was still weak, and a very little thing would upset her.

"Oh, my dear!" she said, putting her hand on her husband's arm, "with all our poverty and anxiety and illness, think how lucky we are, for we have each other—and them!"

VI

IT was on Pine Mountain that their last tryst was kept. No word had been given, and yet as Constance climbed the leafy path, dappled with sunshine and shadow, she knew that David soon would follow.

The faithful Sandy acted as body-guard, and now and again he turned to look wistfully down toward the valley, then came back to her side whimpering softly.

All day there had been sounds which he had distrusted. Early in the morning trunks were brought from the attic, and after that there was much hurrying to and fro. Drearily he had left the room where one of his companions was at work, only to find the other plunged in the same occupation on the floor above. After dinner, a quieter meal than

usual, the farmer had forgotten to feed him. Altogether, the household seemed demoralized.

Now, suddenly, all his woes were forgotten. Even before Constance could hear it, his quick ears detected a faint, far-away stir. All eager he bounded down the path, then back to her, with glad barks, proclaiming, "See what I've brought you. Now let's be happy!" And they were. For of the frailties of the human mind, one of the most blessed is its tardiness to recognize a crisis. Afterwards one looks back and wonders how the eyes could have shone and the lips have smiled.

All through the afternoon they rambled over the mountain together, exploring their favorite haunts, and even discovering new fastnesses. And they talked of many things — of most things — except the fact that they were soon to part.

They climbed to the top of the mountain to see the sunset — a glorious pageant of

purple and gold, then Constance said that Nurse would be expecting them and they must go. But David laughed, and shook his head mysteriously.

"I was wise," he said, and he led her to a spot among the bushes where a basket was concealed.

In fact, Sandy's critical nose was already showing signs of interest.

Constance stared in amazement.

"Did you arrange it all this morning, and bring it here?" she asked.

"Don't be so prosaic!" David begged. "It's a gift from the fairies, and here is our table all flat and smooth, waiting to be spread."

"It will be growing cold when the sun goes down," Constance objected.

"We 'll build a bonfire."

"But going home" —

"You mind?"

"Oh! not for myself."

"There 's not a bit of dampness in the air,

and I never felt better in my life," he assured her. "Come and gather up sticks."

They brought armfuls of dry leaves, and brown pitchy pine cones which were sure to sputter and smell deliciously, twigs and branches of all sizes, and lastly some big logs which they tugged together to make the burden lighter.

Then they sank down on the soft carpet of pine needles, laughing and breathless. It was the same spot where they had come on their first ramble, and they leaned against the big fallen pine — Constance's early friend — for support.

"You poor old thing!" the girl said, patting its bark sympathetically. "I 'm only sorry for you now!"

Her hat had slipped back upon her head, and the bronze hair was escaping in little joyous curls. Perhaps it was something in the man's face, watching hers so eagerly, which made her spring rather suddenly to her feet.

"Don't you feel hungry?" she asked practically. "Don't you think it's time for supper?"

She pinned her hat to a branch and turned back her cuffs.

"When one is doing housework one does n't want anything in the way," she explained.

"You don't mean me, do you?" David asked.

They drew the basket from its cubbyhole, and unpacked it together, laughing over each new discovery.

"This is all Nurse's doing," David said, as he handed out a chicken, robust and beautifully brown. "Would n't you know it? When she asked me what we would like, I said just to have it a 's'prise' the way she used to give us boys when we went camping in the back yard."

"Did she do that for you, too?" Constance queried, raising her eyes from the basket to look at him eagerly. "She was

always arranging them for me in the garden, and for ever so long I thought it was the fairies."

"What did I tell you?" David laughed.

He was lifting out a plate of thin bread and butter sandwiches, heaped generously high. Then there were jams and fresh gingerbread, and a complete equipment for tea-making.

"Nursie never would let her children live on cold food alone," Constance said.

She had spread a snowy cloth, and David with a critical eye was arranging the dishes upon it.

As the dusk closed in around them they lighted the bonfire and ate their supper in the cheerful glow. Sandy sitting close at hand was rewarded with choice bits from the feast, and when his companions occasionally became too absorbed to notice him, he reminded them of his presence by a gentle nudge with his cold nose.

"Two 's company — eh, old boy?" Da-

vid said cheerfully, and he tossed him a bit of chicken which Sandy deftly caught.

"Dear old boy!" Constance whispered, burying her face in the dog's neck. "Who will love you like this, when we're gone?"

The fire, brilliant at first, had burned low, and they were staring in silence into its glowing embers. Constance leaned against the tree-trunk, and David lay curled on the ground in a posture almost as easy as Sandy's own.

"We're just a part of it," the man mused aloud. "Just a little part of this great nature scheme, and to-morrow we shall slip away and be forgotten."

A burning brand fell from the fire, flashing a tongue of flame into the darkness.

David gave a sudden start.

"Constance!" he cried, "we can't. We belong here together — you and I."

He put his hand on hers, and in his touch was that which made her draw away.

She looked at him gravely — a look which bore no earthly desire.

"I thought so last night," she said, "but to-night I have changed. I know better."

"And to-night *I* have changed," the man cried. "I was keeping my real self under as I have all along — crushing out the best and the natural because I thought it was right. Oh, dear heart! it is n't meant that we should suffer so — that we who have been coming to each other all these years should give up our love at last."

He sprang to his feet and came close to her.

"Look up, dear, at those wonderful stars," he whispered. "They seem to belong to us — here. I think they looked down on us in fairyland, when we played there together."

There was a sound in the treetops. A late bird was calling to his mate. Then again all was silent, save for the wind in the branches.

Constance did not speak and the man went on passionately.

"I had to act as I did. I had to take almost a false position to establish a true one — to make myself out cold and hard to rouse you. I knew the spirit was there. No one entirely crushed could have written the letters you did. And soon that wonderful courage of yours asserted itself. But that time of struggle and growth is past. Now "—

"There must be no 'now,'" Constance whispered. "It is all a part of the great whole."

"No, no!" the man cried. "Now it is different. I want to make up for the harsh treatment. I want just to love you dear, on and on till the end — to give you what God meant you to have. Think what it would be!"

She was very close to him, and he felt that she quivered, but still she did not speak.

"Listen, dear!" he said, lowering his voice. "I 'm not talking mere idle words. Look through the trees."

In the valley below, they could see the

lights in the houses, twinkling out one by one.

"Think of the happy people there. Why should that be denied us? Look at the grassy hill above the village. The minister will marry us, and we will build our little house and live there. We won't mind the winter snows. We'll tramp through them, and love them. And then the spring will come green and beautiful. Oh! there must be several winters and springs to come for us" —

Constance covered her face with her hands.

"You are going to Colorado," she said, and her voice was cold and colorless. "Your mother and sister are waiting there for you."

"And is my duty to them, and not to you?"

"It is partly to yourself. The doctor said that you might live there for some years."

She spoke as one in a dream.

"And what is length of years?" David cried. "What is a pale existence out there —

dragging on and on — compared to a little while here — with you?"

He drew her hands from her face, and with his own encircled her cheeks. He looked long and earnestly into her eyes and would have kissed her, but that they mutely forbade him.

"Last night you would have let me," he murmured, releasing her at last. "And to-night when I will" —

She laughed softly, the tension over. "Isn't it always so?" she said.

"Constance!" the man cried, "what is it that has changed you so?"

"You," she answered. "Think dear. You've forgotten yourself for an instant. It's only natural — the reaction after a long strain. But you've been too good a teacher. What I've been learning and learning all these weeks I couldn't forget, and now when it's needed" —

"In my time of weakness," David murmured.

He flung himself down, burying his face in the piny earth. When he raised it the passion was gone.

"You 've saved me from myself," he said.

"As you saved me last night," she answered.

He touched her hand, and it was cold.

"Where are your feelings?" he asked wonderingly.

"All gone. I have no more. It 's better so."

But her voice belied her.

Then because of the subtle change which had come, she let him put his arm around her and draw her head against his shoulder.

The moon peered down through the waving treetops. The night air blew coldly about them. At last she stirred in his arms.

"Shall it be good-night?" he asked.

"Yes, dear — good-night."

And they kissed each other. But it was not born of earthly things. It was the kiss of renunciation.

As they climbed down the mountain together, they spoke but once.

"I was a brute to-night," David said.

"No," Constance answered, "you were human."

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